

men extend it? Would they give this right to free negroes? Would they give it to all, indiscriminately? What then becomes of the qualifications of age, sex, residence within the State. I can consent to no such extension as this—but my desire is to give to this right as wide an extension as prudently and safely we can, and to secure to all to whom the right now is by law or can safely be given, as full, free, and untrammelled exercise of this invaluable right as is consistent with its preservation and the purity of the ballot box. The gentleman says we cannot fully guard against the abuses complained of, that the remedy proposed is inadequate. Admitted; but what then? Does it follow because we cannot do all we desire, that therefore we are to do nothing? Are we to conclude, because we are imperfect by nature and can in nothing attain perfection—that we are therefore not to endeavor to approximate to it? I am of a very different opinion, and think we should do all we can, to save and protect ourselves and the freemen of Maryland, and then bear the lessened evils which we cannot remedy.

Mr. MERRICK said it was too true, as had been said, party strifes and political corruptions had led and were likely to lead to the destruction of republican institutions. They had produced the downfall of all that had gone before us, and their warning voice sounded in our ears to guard ourselves from a similar impending fate. "The price of liberty, we all knew, was perpetual vigilance." It becomes us, then, the chosen agents of the free people of Maryland, clothed with the high power of framing a new compact of Government for them and their posterity, now especially to exercise that vigilance and to engraft into that compact all the appropriate safeguards to that liberty which our united wisdom could devise. Nothing was dearer, nothing more precious in the eyes of a free people, than the elective franchise. It was the life-giving principle of republics, and not less dearly cherished by freemen, than the ruddy drops which warm their hearts. Protect it then—preserve it in its purity. We have had many violent party contentions; but violent as these have been, they are nothing compared with what we are reasonably to expect will arise in the distant future. The Constitution we now make is to operate for good or for evil upon that future. Its effects—its working—are to be felt when we who make it—when the parties of the present day and all who compose them, shall have passed away and been forgotten. Nothing we can do is to be of greater effect, than the means devised for the preservation of the purity of the ballot-box. While that purity shall be preserved, all will be safe, and upon it and its efficiency our habit now is, and this habit will grow and strengthen with our growth, to repose with confident security. Thus the ballot-box, if pure, has been found and will be found in future, to be the reliance of all good republicans for a redress of grievances, and to supercede the necessity of all appeals to violence. It has been and it will be to all defeated parties, even when writhing and chafing under the mortification of recent defeat,

"Hope's precious pearl in sorrow's cup,
Which unmelted at the bottom lay,
To shine again when all drunk up,
The bitterness shall pass away."

Yes, sir; reliance upon this, if its purity be preserved, will calm their angry passions, will sooth their troubled breasts. They will submit to present defeat, and trust to reason to bring about convictions of right in the minds of their fellow citizens at a subsequent trial of strength in this peaceful mode. But let frauds and corruptions creep in; let freemen be unjustly deprived of their rights in this particular; let the decisions of your ballot-box be rendered false and polluted, and the beauty of that pearl is lost; its lustre is gone—gone and forever; and with it dies the hopes of freemen and of freedom. Guard it then, and guard it well, I implore you.

Reference had been made, by the honorable gentleman from Cecil, to the act of Congress requiring members of Congress to be elected by single districts throughout the United States; and the constitutionality of that law had been questioned. He (Mr. MERRICK) was a member of Congress at the time that law was passed; and he knew, plain as the language of the Constitution appeared to him to be, which conferred the power, the constitutionality of that exercise of the power, was questioned at the time. It was made a party question of—one party contending for the power as exercised, and the other contending that Congress could not require the elections to be held in the States by districts without themselves marking out the districts. The majority in both Houses of Congress thought otherwise, and the law was passed as it now stands on the Statute books. Party spirit ran high; and for a time the defeated party manifested a spirit of determined resistance to the law. But as soon as the passions and excitement of the hour had subsided and reason resumed her throne in the public mind, the law was carried into effect in every part of the Union; there was a general acquiescence under its provisions, and the members of Congress are now every where elected by single districts. This had occasioned the necessity for re-arranging the Congressional districts in Maryland, and the consequent division of some of the counties and the city of Baltimore, and the attachment of parts of each to different districts for the election of Congressmen. Up to that time the requirement of a certain length of previous residence within the district as a qualification of the voter, was not so necessary, because the county and city limits had been always respected, and the qualification of six months previous residence within the county or city was considered sufficient; but since this new division, the former requirement of six months residence has been found not to answer the purpose designed by it in the district—to form which, counties and the city are divided. And more than that, it does not operate equally and alike upon all the citizens of the State. In this way, every man having the other qualifications, is entitled, under the law, to vote at all elections in the county or city where he has resided for the last preceding